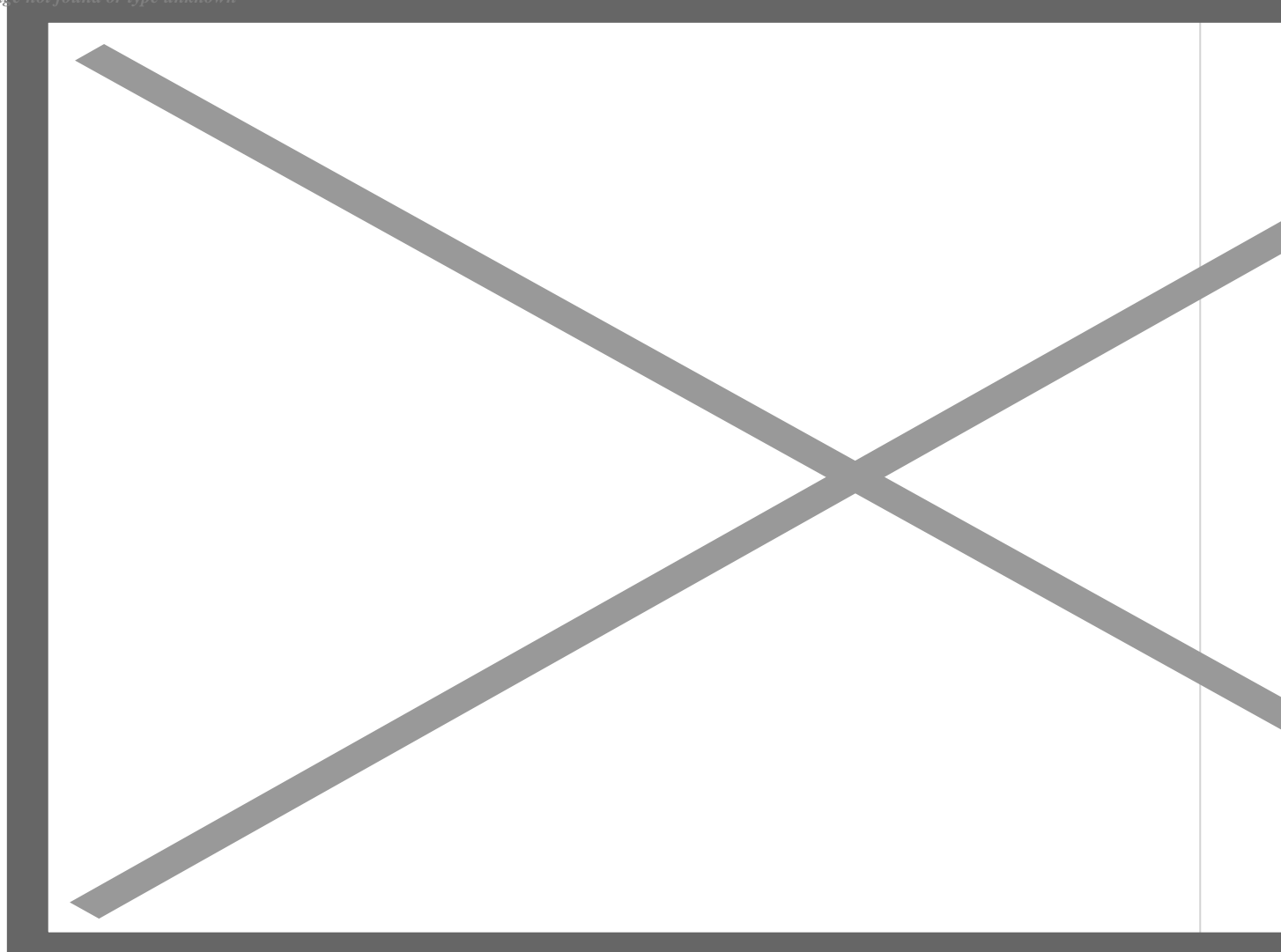


Syria slams U.S. sanctions for hampering humanitarian aid delivery

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Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (R) meets with Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian

Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the United Nations, Martin Griffiths, in Damascus, Syria, on February 13, 2023. (Photo by Syrian Presidential Office)

Damascus, February 15 (RHC)-- Syrian President Bashar al-Assad says emergency humanitarian aid must be brought into all quake-hit areas in northwest Syria, including those not under the Damascus government's control. Assad made the remarks in a meeting with Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the United Nations Martin Griffiths and his accompanying delegation in the Syrian capital city of Damascus.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the aftermath of last week's deadly earthquake in the worst-affected areas of Latakia, Hama, Aleppo and Idlib, with the Syrian president asserting that aid needs to be delivered to victims in all earthquake-devastated towns and cities in northwestern Syria, including militant-held areas.

The Syrian president also said international efforts must concentrate on reconstruction of Syria's vital infrastructure, as it is a matter of great urgency for the stability of Syrians and return of displaced people to their communities.

Griffiths, for his part, appreciated the Syrian government's prompt response in terms of disaster relief operations. He underscored that the UN supports search and rescue operations in Syria and will facilitate delivery of humanitarian aid into the northwestern part of the war-battered country.

Syria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Bassam Sabbagh has dismissed the United States' decision to issue a six-month sanctions exemption for all transactions related to providing disaster relief after the powerful earthquake, saying the measure would be "insufficient" to offset the long-term dire consequences of the coercive measures.

Speaking at a closed-door UN Security Council session on the humanitarian situation in Syria following the quake on Monday, Sabbagh said that there was an international delay in extending a helping hand as a result of the US-led illegal coercive economic measures, whose effects, "are no less destructive than the devastating earthquake."

The UN envoy said more than 250,000 Syrian citizens have been displaced as a result of the recent calamity. "In order to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to all quake-hit regions, Syria agrees to open more border crossings in the northern sector of the country for an initial period of three months," the top Syrian diplomat said.

Sabbagh went on to say that his country is in dire need of humanitarian aid following the recent 7.8 magnitude earthquake, arguing that U.S. sanctions and unilateral Western coercive measures have complicated the situation. "Those who have not been affected by the earthquake should not be allowed to die of cold, hunger, lack of medical supplies and/or safe shelter," he said.

He said it was highly necessary for quake-damaged infrastructure and facilities, including water supply and sewage networks, hospitals and clinics, to be repaired quickly in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

The death toll from the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that struck Syria on February 6 has risen to more than 5,814, according to tallies by the United Nations and the Syrian government. The death toll in neighboring Turkey has also climbed to 31,643.

The biggest proportion of the fatalities in Syria has occurred in the territory that is being held by the Takfiri terrorist groups. The United Nations says an anti-government group that has been designated as a terrorist group by the international community is preventing aid consignments from being delivered to the

earthquake-stricken areas in the northern part of Syria.

A spokesman for the UN's humanitarian aid office said Sunday that there were "issues with approval" by the group, which it identified as the terrorist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The group has been waging deadly violence against Syrian people and government forces alike since 2011, when the Arab country found itself in the grip of foreign-backed terrorism.

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